

Sept. 7, 2021

Dear Tara,

I decided that instead of finding a card this year, I'd write you a letter, so I went on an archeological dig to find my old journal where I wrote about the day you were born. I've spent hours reading old entries about all kinds of events that I no longer recall, especially when I wrote something such as "Debbie and I had a meaningful talk that explained a lot" yet I have no idea what we talked about or even which Debbie I was talking to! But it has been an interesting journey. I had forgotten I wrote letters of a sort to you on your first few birthdays. And I'm embarrassed to say I wasn't as faithful with your sisters. Maybe I knew you'd need them more someday. Anyway, I'll share some of the writings from the journal, paraphrase others and share some memories that I didn't write down then. (The brackets indicate things I added when I typed the journal entry, so it makes sense.)

First I want to start with when we found out I was pregnant with you. To be honest, I wasn't crazy to be pregnant again so soon. I wrote about it in my journal: "Wednesday, Feb. 9, 1977. One week ago today we got a possibility confirmed: There will be another baby in our family, due Aug. 26. Randy is ecstatic already, but I'm just sick enough to be indifferent right now. Give me a couple of months until I can feel it move, and I'll be so excited. Having babies can be a worry in so many ways. How do we pay for it? Where will we put it in our little trailer? Will it be all right? Will there be any complications? How will Jemma accept another person demanding attention? So many questions."

When we told Bob and Geri the news, Geri was angry. She yelled at your dad, not knowing I was on the extension listening. She said a lot of hurtful things about how irresponsible we were, how young we were, how stupid we were. When your dad hung up, he came into the bedroom to talk to me and found me sobbing into my pillow. He left the room, closed the door and went back out to the kitchen. He called his mother back and in no uncertain terms told her off for upsetting me so much. That made me proud. You need people to stand up for once in awhile.

The pregnancy went along just fine, though you can see from that journal entry I just wrote above, you were a couple of weeks late!

Tuesday, Sept. 13, 1977: I am super tired but want to write while today is still today, for today Tara was born. Ruth Ann came Friday night and we canned pears Monday – that was a sure sign it would happen soon. I woke up at 11:30 p.m. with cramps, which of course got progressively worse as the night wore on. I got up at 2:30 a.m. to shower and wash a load of clothes and read a magazine. Randy, of course, was trying to sleep through all this, and he did catch a few winks. At quarter to six, I said "Let's go." We were there by 6 a.m.

The nurse said I was at a "5" [dilation] (halfway) and sent Randy to admit me. Just a second later, the nurse was hollering for the doctor and Randy to hurry and for me to pant so I wouldn't have her [before everyone arrived].

At 6:33 a.m., Tara was here, and I was so happy. I think I was happier because I wasn't so tired like last time. She's been here [in my room] three times, and she's so precious and has such a strong mind of her own already. She really gets perturbed when she tries to nurse and can't get it figured right off the bat. So like Jemma that way. ... I'll have to close now and write more tomorrow. I'm so tired now.

Tuesday, Sept. 20, 1977: Tara is one week old today and much has happened since her birth. Mostly my routine has become so busy that I haven't had time to write as I should.

I stayed in the hospital all day Tuesday and psyched myself up to go home Wednesday. But Dr. Hammond [who delivered all five girls] wanted me to stay over, and I cried on the phone to Randy. The baby was a little yellow, so Dr. Hammond had a bilirubin count done and it was 13.3, about mid-range. He had her put under some florescent lights and ordered bilirubin tests at 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. each day. I'll try to explain what this is all about. We have what is called an ABO blood incompatibility. I am O+ and Randy is A+. Jemma is A and sensitized me against A, so that I passed on anti-A antibodies to Tara, who is also A. As these antibodies break down the red blood cells, it causes an overload on the liver and then jaundice or yellowness [of the skin] occurs. If it gets up to a count of about 20, an exchange transfusion is necessary. The lights help

rid the body of the problem on the skin and often keep the count below 20 where it would rise without the lights. Dr. Hammond called in Dr. Lindsay [a pediatrician] to see Tara and watch her through this.

Wednesday night, Randy had Mike [Nelsen] come and they blessed Tara to get over the jaundice well. The count was up that night to 14.9, went back down Thursday to 14.5 where it stayed, but Friday morning it jumped to 16.5 but was down to 13 Friday night. So Dr. Lindsay said to take her out of the lights for Saturday and see if the count stayed down. It dropped again Saturday and Saturday night, then rose a little Sunday, but the doctor said to go ahead and take her home and just watch her color. If she seemed to get yellower, we'd have to take her back. But so far, she's doing beautifully.

She's getting to be such an individual in her own right. She is very insistent about wanting to nurse and not have the bottle. And she wants me to just hold her at times while she snoozes. Jemma loves her, too, rather roughly, but still she finds Tara to be an interesting new thing and she hasn't seemed jealous. Jemma wanted to sit on my lap while I was nursing once, and she hit Tara. But generally she wants to hold Tara and watch her in her bed. I hope this continues to work out. I sure love them both so much. I was wondering the other day if I would love them equally, but then I realized I love them each so differently for themselves. They are so precious.

I came home from the hospital Thursday morning [leaving Tara there]. If I hadn't had Jemma to go home to I would have bawled all the way.

Until you were released, I went up to the hospital every few hours to feed you. You were in what was called the "Border Nurse," but it was really just part of the Intensive Care Nursery. One day while we were there, we stepped into the bathing room where a nurse was washing the tiniest baby I had ever seen. I asked how small she was and the nurse said she was 1 pound. I asked if she would survive, and the nurse looked at me as if I was daft. "She's already dead," she snapped and continued dressing her. A few minutes later the monitors started beeping and all the staff rushed to one tiny baby out in the ICU. After several minutes, they turned off the machines and moved away. Another baby had died. Randy looked at me and said, "We have to get our baby out of here NOW!" I reminded him that prematurity was not catching, but we both certainly realized how fragile life can be and counted our blessings that this jaundice problem was all we had.

It isn't written in my journal, but I remember that Grandpa Nelsen helped pay the doctor and hospital bills for you. He always claimed he "owned" part of you because of that!

Reading through the journal, I came across short reference to how you were growing and developing. "Friday, Oct. 28, 1977: Tara is growing so fast. I'm afraid we're spoiling her terribly. Between RuthAnn and Me, we have time to hold her almost all day, which she dearly loves. It's a trial to keep Jemma off of her and to [get her] to be careful when she tries to love her. Tara came down with a cold the day after we moved [the trailer from Orem to Provo] and now it's diarrhea. I don't know what we're doing wrong with the poor little girl."

RuthAnn lived with us for several months, so you really got spoiled. Without me knowing, she dribbled Dr. Pepper in your mouth a few times, and you liked it. She also fed you rice cereal when you were only a couple of weeks old because she was tired of you up in the night and hoped you would sleep better if your tummy was fuller.

Monday, Nov. 7, 1977: Tara is official now. I think I wrote the same thing about Jemma. It was a cool, cloudy day [Sunday, Nov. 6] but there was no rain or snow so it was a nice day yesterday. Tara was so pretty in the blessing dress. Everyone thinks she looks just like Jemma, but she looks just like herself to me. I talked to Mother yesterday, and she thinks Tara looks more like me when I was a baby, [more] than we always thought Jemma did.

Randy's folks and grandma came about 11 a.m., and everyone oohed and aahed over Tara till church at noon. There were six babies blessed and two 8-year-olds confirmed. [It took so long that] there was only 15 minutes for testimonies afterward.

Randy gave Tara a beautiful blessing, but that's how Randy always does. RuthAnn kept some notes for me on the highlights of the blessing. Some day when you read this, Tara, you'll be able to know what Daddy said. He blessed that you would have all the material things necessary for life. He also cautioned you to have desires of righteousness and to obey your parents and heed their counsel. Daddy spoke for all of when he said we are so happy to have you, and we surely are. He blessed you with good health, something he values very much because he has been so sick most of his life with asthma. Daddy also blessed that you would one day choose a companion to take you to the temple.

I thought you were the prettiest of all the babies and Daddy was so proud when he held you up for the ward to admire. Standing in the circle was Grandpa Nelsen, Uncle Steve, Uncle Mike and our next-door neighbor Colin Luke. As usual, Tara, you were an excellent baby and so interested in everything that was happening.

The meeting was long and trying for Jemma (and me). [After church] RuthAnn and I fixed chicken and rice, an easy dish that feeds everyone. There was also Bavarian [jello salad], peas and carrots and RuthAnn's delicious rolls. RuthAnn was the only one here from the Dials. From the Nelsens we had Mom and Dad [Bob and Geri], Grandma [Great Grandma Nelsen], Steve and Jody and Seth, Mike and his girlfriend, Sharon [I do not remember her at all, BTW]. Quite a crew for dinner. Randy's folks and Grandma stayed overnight at Motel 6 so they wouldn't have to rush off and could visit. Randy's mom brought lots of things for the girls. For Jemma, there were two pairs of pajamas, two pairs of slippers and hair ribbons. Tara got booties, moccasins, socks and plastic pants [worn over cloth diapers].

... Seth and Jemma are quite the duo. They love to tease Tara, kiss her till she cries and try to put the sunglasses on her.

Your first Christmas was a brown Christmas, no snow, which made it hard to feel the Christmas spirit. As usual, I had to make stuff for gifts because we didn't have much money. RuthAnn spent Christmas Eve at our house (she had an apartment in Provo at the time). Your dad had everyone up at 7 a.m. Jemma handed out the presents, but, of course, you were too young to care though you got a blue doll and a ducky that you loved because you were finally old enough to grab things. Here's the list of what you got for Christmas: yellow ducky, pink and white pants' outfit, rattle from Grandma and Grandpa Nelsen; blue dolly, musical ball, pink blanket sleepers from Grandma and Grandpa Dial; orange bear from Uncle Mike; Sacramento book from Aunt RuthAnn (and I think I still have it, by the way). RuthAnn gave you and Jemma a green bean bag chair. I made you a blue dress and Santa gave you a granny square ball.

Sunday, April 2, 1978: I've been thinking all day of how much of life is slipping away. Tara is already 7 months old, and Jemma will be 2 years old in two months. I can't believe it.

We all went for a ride in the rain today, and Randy and I talked about how much we love our two girls. Recently, our neighbor's granddaughter died of crib death, and it really hit me hard even though I don't know the family well. It could very easily be our family, and just the idea of losing either of our children is upsetting to me. Randy is very logical about the idea, reminding me that Jemma and Tara are only on loan to us. [You really belong to Heavenly Father.] Besides, it's the two of us that really matter, for it will be us as a couple and our girls with their husbands in the next life that will really matter. And we'll all be a family. I just keep praying we'll all be together here as long as we can. ...

Tara is starting to make a lot of physical changes. Her hand coordination increases every day, and of course, everything goes right into her mouth. She started to roll over a few weeks ago to go anywhere, but last weekend she discovered she can go faster when she lies on her tummy and scoots by pushing with her feet and pulling with her arms. One can't help picking her up when she kicks her feet and laughs. She laughs a lot, like Jemma, but there's no mistaking that she has her own personality. She's certainly a Momma's girl, though, and bawls if strangers pick her up.

Sunday, May 14, 1978: Tara's latest trick, which started last Monday, is to crawl to a chair and then stand up to it. She's hardly even played with toys all week but just goes to the chairs and

stand up. She stands up in her crib, too. Her big problem is getting down, and so far falling seems to be the only answer.

By the time Jemma was two she had a pretty good vocabulary, but everything needed a descriptor attached: "my black shoes." You were "Tara my sister" every time she used your name. I thought that was so cute.

Wednesday, June 7, 1978 [day after Jemma's 2nd birthday]: Tara grows in leaps and bounds almost daily. She's already bigger than Jemma was at her age. She's walking all around the furniture and can crawl up on stools and the potty chair. She loves to stand up to the mirror watch herself. She also loves music in a way Jemma never has. She loves to sit and listen to Randy sing and play piano. And she'd pound on the piano all day herself if I'd let her.

On Sept. 24, 1978, I wrote a letter to you in my journal. Here it is:

Dear Tara,

I had wanted to write on your birthday — well, better late than never. I want to write a few "remember things" for you to look back on because, of course, you won't remember them when you are older.

You are a very special child to Daddy and me, and we love you so very much. We worried at first how Jemma would accept you, but from the first she too has loved you very much.

At 1-year-old you finally have enough hair that's long enough that few people ask if you're a boy. I try to put a barrette in your hair, but you think it's some kind of a game to pull it out. You are a very smiley baby with a Jimmy Carter smile — all teeth — that is if you had a mouth full of teeth. At this point there are only four with No. 5 barely peeking through on the bottom. For your birthday you finally got brave enough to walk and today you go everywhere. Just today you learned to stand in the middle of the room without pulling up to anything. Smartie-pants!

You have a lovely disposition — usually. Like everyone else in the world, you can get pretty ornery. You want so much to be as big as Jemma and do everything she can do. And you sure try. Usually Jemma lets you tag along, but sometimes she'll say, "Tara in house, OK?" You tease Jemma terribly already. You sit on her blanket when she's trying to play or just sit on her, laughing all the time, until Jemma is crying. You were teasing Daddy today by sitting on him till he finally said, "Save me, Mommy!" What a character you are! And we love you so much.

Your birthday was a lovely day. I dressed you in a new pink pants outfit Grandma Nelsen gave you for your birthday. Jemma and I spent all day trying to be extra nice, and we just played with you. We swung a lot, and that's one of your favorite things to do. Gifts you got were a green jacket and \$5 from Grandma Dial; pajamas from Mom and Dad; milk bottle set from Seth; a doll blanket from Heather and Holli Luke next door; \$3 from Great Grandma Nelsen; socks and a spoon set from Aunt Ruthie. The Lukes next door came over for birthday cake, and you didn't have the faintest idea what was going on. You loved the cake — chocolate cake role.

Well, you're asleep now, and Jemma should be too. I have to put you two to bed at different times because you start messing around and playing so neither of gets to rest.

Remember always how much I love you.

Love Momma

Here's a few other gems I wrote down:

Sunday, May 27, 1979: Tara has a philosophy to solve everything — "Gone."

Monday, May 20, 1980: [A teenage boy is walking down the street in just cutoff jeans and no shirt or shoes. "Look, Momma," Tara said loud enough for the boy to hear, "he's turning into the Grober Hook [Incredible Hulk], huh!"] I was never so glad someone couldn't understand Tara.

Saturday, Sept. 13, 1980: Today was Tara's third birthday — I can't believe she's so old already. We had a party today. [Neighborhood children came and Aunt Ruthie.] Tara will go stay with Ruthie Monday night so she thinks her birthday won't be over until then.

I'm afraid Tara will always want to be older than she really is. But she can only grow at her own rate. Even as a tiny baby she wanted to be up and crawling around and grasping toys

when she was just too little. Tara rarely takes a nap these days but often falls asleep early at night. I don't think she'll ever outgrow early rising. It must be some of Great-Grandma Dial [Rozena] in her.

Tara is a pretty little girl, especially with a full, twinkling smile that shows a slight dimple in her right cheek. Usually it is a justified mischievous smile — she is always into everything. Sometimes she is a great trial for it seems almost daily that she is ruining something, tearing up something or breaking something — and always something I don't want any of that done to it. Then she'll come crawl up on my lap, and she's that pretty little blond again. Her hair is a dishwater blonde and fine and thin. It has grown faster in back than front and then the half-inch bangs she cut for herself don't help much. I'd like to trim her hair the same length all around but Randy says no.

Tara loves to play outside and heads there first thing in the morning. She loves to swing and ride her trike. She doesn't walk straight yet, and I'm going to take her back to the doctor sometime after Christmas, so we can get her legs straightened out.

Her big thing now is wanting to be 5 years old, so she can cross the street. What a character! She is a Sunbeam now in Primary and loves to go.

She has also had some problems. She wets her pants a lot, and the doctor says it is a nerve transfer problem — her brain just isn't getting the signal in time. So I've tried to be more relaxed about it, and she is doing a little better. She also is a screamer. No hurt is just a little one. *She screams bloody murder all the time, and you can hear her clear down the street.*

But we love her a lot. And when she puts her arms around me and says, "I lub you, Mommy," well, I can't help but forget the rotten things she'd done that day. She almost always says, "Thanks for this lubby dinner, Momma." And she loves to say the blessing although she usually blesses Jemma and Melanie and forgets the food.

You are special to us Tara. Daddy and I love you very much. Always remember that.

Friday, Oct. 31, 1980: You were a bunny for Halloween

Monday, June 29, 1981: Tara started tap lessons last Tuesday. She was scared about getting started and now she can hardly wait for tomorrow. I bought her tap shoes and need to get some ballet slippers today. They just go once a week until August and then they'll have a recital. I think this will really help her coordination.

Wednesday, Aug. 5, 1981: Tara dropped a brick on her foot last night. It hurt some, but she wasn't complaining. Then this morning she was jumping off the bunk beds and came out just sobbing. Her little right foot was twice its size. When Randy came from work, we took her to the hospital for X-rays. Nothing was broken, but it would have been had she been older. The doctor said it was just a bad crush injury. He put her in a splint, which was a hard cast that was molded to the back of her leg and bottom of her foot and was held in place with ace wraps. She was supposed to wear it a week. I put one of Randy's socks over it to keep it clean, and tonight she wore a hole clear through to the cast. The swelling is down, so I think we've seen the last of the splint. [That "week" lasted a few hours, I'm afraid.]

Tuesday, Aug. 11, 1981: Today was Tara's first dance recital. Oh, she's no star, but she's had a lot of fun. She really needs the coordination practice. She was in a tap number called "3 Little Fishies," and they all had shimmery gold fish pinned on the front. In ballet, they did "Dancing Leaves" with leaves pinned on front, and an umbrella dance and "Quack Said the Duck." It was a cute little program. I hope I can get her in the fall class. She needs something to do while Jemma goes to school, although the dancing is really after school hours. [I'm pretty sure that didn't happen because we never had money.]

Sunday, Sept. 14, 1981: Today Tara is four years old. When Grandma and Grandpa Nelsen called and asked if it was her birthday, she said, "No." That's because we really celebrated it yesterday. We had the party yesterday at 1 p.m. instead of 5 p.m. as planned because of a ward party that night. [four kids are listed as guests, but I only remember Kelly Quimby]. We ate hot dogs and chips, a great way to fill in the time at a birthday party. We played Drop-th-Hanky and

then opened presents and then ate cake. We made a darling cat cake with pink frosting and red licorice whiskers and eyes and nose. ... Tara wasn't impressed with all the clothes she got as gifts, but she really needs them. After her party, I took her to the car races [which I covered for The Daily Herald] and then we got home just in time to go to the ward picnic.

Today was really her birthday. We went to church and sang Happy Birthday at supper, but otherwise it wasn't too much of a day.

Tara, I want to write a little to you about you on your fourth birthday. You can be a very loving and obedient child, but you also can be very frustrating to me. You are so impatient to grow up and always have been, even when you were a tiny baby. I am frustrating to you, too. I'm afraid I have a bad habit of tuning you kids out — it helps me cope with the noise and silliness and fighting that's always going on. Then when you come up to me, I'm somewhere else and you get so mad when I don't give immediate attention to you. Well, there's something we both need to work on — me on being in outer space so much and you on being a little more patient. At this stage in your life, you are a very silly, little girl, that drives me crazy, especially when we're late for church or trying to get to bed. But you are a very happy child. Now that Jemma is off to school, you are easily filling the time with your own antics — and antics they are. Not long ago you announced that you were going to grow up and have a baby boy so we could have a brother around here. Just be patient, little one, and I'll have one instead [We were working #4 baby at the time.]

You are very special to Daddy and Me, Tara, and a real challenge. You are so much yourself, so different from your sisters. There is a definite mischievous twinkle in your eye and, well, I can't explain it really. You just seem to need extra love, understanding and patience on my part. No matter how our lives turn out, I want you to know now that Daddy and I are really trying our hardest to be the best parents for you. Some day when you are a teenager, you probably won't feel the same way, but we will always be loving you and caring about you. Just don't be in such a hurry to grow up that you miss being young because you can never go back to it. I love you, Tara, always remember that.

Sept. 7, 2021: I realize now that I didn't do a very good job of writing regularly in my journal or there would be more stories to tell when you were little. But I hope you catch the common theme throughout. You were then, and are now, very loved.

Have a wonderful birthday, Tara.

Love,
Mom